



### ALONZO de GRATE SMITH, M.S., M.D., 1890-

Dr. Alonzo de Grate Smith, 79, emeritus associate professor of pediatrics in the Howard University College of Medicine, has long been regarded as the "dean" of Negro pediatricians. He is such a man as the strident, yelping young of the moment wot not of, albeit they stand on the shoulders of his ilk.

Dr. Smith became in 1932 the first full time clinician on the Howard medical faculty. As Meharry had no full time clinicians at that time, he was the first full time clinician in the Negro purview, and as no non-Negro medical institutions had then thought of having a Negro clinician on a full time basis, he was the first full time Negro clinician on a medical faculty in the United States. What an irony! Amen, let us pray!

Dr. Smith came to Howard as associate professor and chief of the Division of Pediatrics in 1932. Pediatrics was then loosely bracketed under the Department of Medicine or nebulously regarded administratively as a separate agency. It did not become a Department until July 1, 1949.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Smith served in his original capacity and as pediatrician to Freedmen's Hospital for 13 years until 1945 when he resigned as chief of the Division and became clinical associate professor of pediatrics. He served in the latter post until June 1956 when he was officially retired after 23 years at Howard.

Because the Department of Pediatrics today has become the outstanding clinical department at Howard under the leadership of Dr. Roland B. Scott, significant interest must attach to what manner of man it was who laid the foundations for such progress.

Dr. Alonzo Smith was born July 29, 1890, in East Orange, N.J., the son of Greene and Mary Smith. He was the only one of five offspring to survive childhood. Dr. Smith's parents came from Virginia. His father was a blacksmith and after moving to Philadelphia, wanted young Alonzo to follow in this occupation, but his mother, who lived apart, prevailed as to his further education, so that Dr. Smith moved to New York and graduated from the DeWitt Clinton High School there, then the leading academic school of the city.

He pursued the first two years of collegiate study at Howard University and then entered Long Island Medical College (now Downstate Medical Center) which awarded him the M.D. in 1919. Later he received the B.S. from the College of the City of New York in 1923 and the M.S. in biochemistry from Columbia University in 1932.

Dr. Smith served his internship in Kansas City General Hospital No. 2 and in 1920 entered private practice in New York City. For the next decade he served in various capacities on the staffs of the Vanderbilt Clinic, Mt. Sinai Hospital and Harlem Hospital. In 1928 he entered upon full time work at Harlem Hospital, devoting his entire attention to pediatrics. He had begun to concentrate in this field in 1922 and at Harlem had served as instructor in pediatrics to nurses since 1926, becoming chief of the pediatric clinic in 1930.

During his career in New York, Dr. Smith was identified with various public service activities including that of physician to the pre-school clinic of the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, and, that of member of the Speaker's Bureau of the New York Tuberculosis and Health Association. For a considerable period he contributed weekly columns on health subjects to the New Amsterdam News, 1925-27, the New York Age, 1928-30, and the Afro-American, 1945-47.

The quiet persuasive powers of Dr. Numa P. G. Adams, Howard's and the country's first Negro medical dean,<sup>2</sup> lured Dr. Smith to Washington. Dr. Adams had little to offer except prospects of a great opportunity to render significant service. Dr. Smith's starting salary was \$3000 in 1932 and when he resigned as chief of the Division in 1945 it was \$4000. Offices for consultative and referral practice in Freedmen's Hospital were supposed to have been provided by the School but these never materialized. He lived for several years in a small apartment and then moved to a modest row house so that from a basement office he could supplement his appallingly low salary. His University has recently made retirement provisions more realistic in terms of the ever rising cost of living, but these were not made retroactive to cover people like Dr. Smith. He was never money conscious, and this is just as well, otherwise he would never have come to Howard. It is in the fruits of his work that Dr. Smith has his reward.

When he joined the Howard faculty, he had become imbued with Dr. Adams' vision and enthusiasm over the opportunities for building an outstanding school.<sup>3</sup> There was no use in asking for money. It was not around in those days. President Mordecai W. Johnson's constant admonition was to build bricks without straw and this Dr. Smith did.



Dr. Alonzo de Grate Smith (right) receiving special award from the Washington Chapter of the Alumni Association of the College of the City of New York, October 24, 1959. From left, Dave Reich, Dave Brody and Herbert Raskin, founder, past president and president, respectively, of the Chapter. (Washington Post photo.)

In his first year three part-time physicians were recruited to the pediatric staff, Drs. Arthur D. Carr, George L. Johnson and Dr. Roy U. Plummer. Five additional part-time staff were added by 1936.<sup>1</sup>

In his first year Dr. Smith instituted a pediatric clerkship in Freedmen's Hospital and in 1936 he and his staff began demonstrations for students in the Contagious Disease Pavilion of Gallinger Municipal, now D.C. General Hospital. In the latter year, with Dr. E. Y. Williams, he initiated a lecture course on, "Problems in Child Behavior." In 1937 senior medical students began to attend the Pediatric Outpatient Clinic in Freedmen's.

Pediatrics was one of the first two residency programs initiated at Freedmen's in 1935. Dr. Nolan A. Owens, a medical graduate of Western Reserve University, was the first pediatric resident. He became Board certified and joined the staff as an attending physician, later resigning to give full time to private practice. In 1937 came Dr. W. Warrick Cardozo as a part-time instructor. An Ohio State medical graduate he became Board certified in 1942. Like Dr. Owens, Dr. Cardozo was an able pediatrician, but both men eschewed a full time Howard appointment because the School would offer no appropriate salaries. All this was naturally frustrating to Dr. Smith.

Early he was hopeful of getting under way a research program which would have recruitment value for pediatrics. An initial study of the use of irradiated ergosterol (Viosterol) in the treatment of rickets was supported by the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation and published in 1940 (see appended list).

In 1939, a former student of Dr. Smith's, Dr. Roland B. Scott, joined the staff as full-time assistant professor of pediatrics and became the natural successor to Dr. Smith as chief of the Division when the latter resigned in 1945. Sharpened by the disillusioning precedents of Dr. Smith, Dr. Owens and Dr. Cardozo, Dr. Scott maintained his private office in the off-hours from the beginning, so that he was never beholden to

the School. On the foundation laid by Dr. Smith, Dr. Scott's relentless energy and perseverance have brought pediatrics to primacy among the Howard clinical departments.

Dr. Smith was an idealist and a zealot for his field. His enthusiasm for his work was contagious, but he was not of the political temperament required to advance one's cause through intramural machinations: The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune could depress him. But the open sincerity of his character made those who had worked with him, his permanent friends. So it was with his patients. After his retirement and as long as he had an office in his residence former patients would return with their children because they had confidence in him over other physicians.

Dr. Smith had broad interests and special gifts. Before Prohibition ended, he became skilled in the art of home brewing. His beer, as the writer recalls, might have been something less than the best of Munich, but the memory is altogether pleasant. His serious talent was in art. Discovering at the age of 26 that he could draw and paint, he made his art work a rewarding avocation. He studied with Arthur Duffner, N.A., and Xavier J. Barile and at the Traphagen School of Art in New York. Later he worked under several other artists at various times.

Dr. Smith called himself strictly a "week-end" artist as most of his painting was done on Sundays. His work was included in the first exhibition of the New York Physicians Art Club and subsequent showings by that organization. He has about 100 oils and numerous water colors to his credit and has exhibited in various showings in addition to those mentioned. One of his paintings, "Still Life," was included in the elaborate brochure, *Parergon*, devoted to art by physicians and published by the Mead Johnson Co. in 1947. For this *Journal* he executed the cover drawing of Dr. Henry Fitzbutler (September 1952) and a likeness of Dr. Numa P.G. Adams (November 1952, p. 468).<sup>4</sup>

Dr. Smith became a diplomate of the American

Board of Pediatrics in 1934, the first Negro to be so certified, and a fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics, in 1945. The Downstate Medical Center of the State University of New York awarded him the Alumni Medallion for Distinguished Service to American Medicine at its Commencement exercises on June 8, 1958. He was the 12th recipient of this medal.<sup>8</sup> On October 24, 1959, the Washington Chapter of the Alumni Association of the College of the City of New York at its annual dinner meeting presented Dr. Smith with a scroll which read:

- A wise and understanding Teacher and Scholar
- A Physician with a deep sense of duty
- A loyal Alumnus and a leader in the Washington Chapter
- A devoted Friend of free higher education and above all
- A untiring and selfless Worker for his fellow man.

Dr. Smith married the former Marie Wright of Memphis, Tenn., in 1928. They have one son, Alonzo, Jr., who earned the A.B. from Georgetown University and the M.S. from Howard. After a tour of duty in the Peace Corps in the Ivory Coast, Africa, he is presently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California at Los Angeles.

Throughout his difficult tasks Dr. Smith enjoyed the

unflagging support and tender attention of his wife. Now somewhat enfeebled, he can reflect upon solid and pioneering contributions to his field and Howard. In this day when the earth abounds with so many who proclaim that progress begins with them, Dr. Smith's career can afford humbling inspiration.

W. MONTAGUE COBB, M.D.

#### PUBLICATIONS BY DR. SMITH

1. Rheumatism in Childen Under Five Years of Age. Arch. Ped., v. 39, pp. 799-810, 1922.
2. Incidence of Physical Defects in Negro Children. J. Negro Educ., v. 5, p. 393, 1937.
3. Treatment of Rickets with Minimal Viosterol Dosage. J. Ped. v. 16, p. 76, 1940.

#### LITERATURE CITED

1. SCOTT, R. B. The Howard Department of Pediatrics. J.N.M.A., v. 59, pp. 457-465, 467, 1967.
2. COBB, W. M. Numa P. G. Adams, 1885-1940. J.N.M.A., v. 43, pp. 43-52, 1951.
3. COBB, W. M. Progress and Portents for the Negro in Medicine. N.A.A.C.P., New York, 1948, 53 pp.
4. Drawings by Physician Artist. J.N.M.A., v. 44, p. 468, 1952.
5. Smith receives New York Medical Alumnni Award. J.N.M.A., v. 50, p. 295, 1958.

(*President's Column, from p. 354*)

exhorted the House to realize that the NMA was operating on a deficit and to take steps to rectify deficit spending. Nevertheless, the NMA has increased its fiscal deficit by \$100,000 to complete its commitment to the NMAF Nursing Home Project in Washington, D.C. It is absolutely imperative that each and every member of the NMA help the NMA meet its commitment by paying the \$100 assessment requested. Through the NMAF, the NMA will be able to accomplish projects on the national health scene never before possible. In December 1968 the ground-breaking for the Nursing Home was held in Washington. In May 1969 the \$50,000 (with promise of more) Weir Foundation funded talent-recruitment program was launched in Washington. These pilot projects can be just the beginning of similar projects for the NMA across the nation.

A survey "State Universities and Black Americans," issued by the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges and the Southern Education Foundation, pointed out that approximately 11 per cent of the nation's population is black, and less than 2 per cent of the students in the nation's major state universities are black. The survey further pointed out that in 80 predominantly white state universities a total student membership of 1,222,382 included only 23,630 Negroes or 1.93 per cent. And only two major white-majority universities, Wayne State in Detroit and Southern Illinois in Carbondale, have full-time undergraduate enrollments which are more than 5 per cent black. And in 1968 there were more foreign students in American universities than U.S. blacks. President

Lyndon B. Johnson at our 73rd annual convention in Houston, Texas called it an indictment of our educational system that only one out of 1000 Negroes becomes a doctor, compared with one out of 460 for whites. Our entire membership has been requested to join in our Crash Talent Recruitment Program of the NMA but only in the target areas of Washington, D.C., Raleigh-Durham Tri-State area, Chicago, St. Louis, East St. Louis, New York City area, Atlanta and Detroit have any meaningful results been reported. It is difficult to reconcile the complacent attitudes and inactivity of the black physician in talent recruitment with the extremely impotent position the black physician finds himself in due to the extreme manpower shortage. To serve a national need and to preserve his own identity in medicine, the Negro physician must get more black students into medicine. Compared to time and money spent in personal pleasures by the average black physician, small amounts of time and money can help a black student achieve a medical education. Is this asking too much of our membership?

The Legislative Committee, under the chairmanship of Dr. John Kenney and with the untiring help of Mr. Loy Kirkpatrick, has done a yeoman's job in the interest of the NMA in matters pertaining to medical legislation in the national arena, and in our relationship with the American Medical Association, and in our support of Howard University School of Medicine and Meharry Medical College. The NMA must develop a stronger and more direct voice in political and legislative matters pertaining to health on the national scene. The Knowles

(Continued on page 367)